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CUTLER: The problem has always been, of course, that consumer groups are at an obvious disadvantage when they're appearing before these boards. Bell can spend a million dollars on legal counsel.

ABBOTT: That's right. I believe that's a role that the officer may very well play, to have a member of his staff to attend on behalf of a substituted group, say the consumers, or just the general community affected.

CUTLER: What do you see as the government's policy towards marketing boards?

ABBOTT: It's not entirely clear what the government's policy is. I view them with guarded suspicion. I don't personally feel that the management of food production has been an unqualified success. They have been, in my opinion, qualified failures, and we should take a look at the need for an overall food strategy, or food policy, just like we have an energy strategy. We should look at the whole, from farm gate to table, and begin to appreciate what happens to a product between the time it leaves the farm gate and reaches the table; what kind of costs are involved, how much is the taxpayer contributing, and what the consumer is paying extra, and so on.

CUTLER: You'd look at packaging, marketing, advertising?

ABBOTT: Right through the whole gamut. In that way, with that kind of an overall strategic view of where we're going, we'd produce policies that didn't just end at one sector and not take account of their impact on another. That's why we've had a problem.

CUTLER: How would you go about this?

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CUTLER: You've got a report which comes down fairly strongly in favor of class actions. Will we see legislation at the same time we see legislation on mergers and monopolies?

ABBOTT: There's certainly a place for class actions. We're rather more or less committed to introducing them. As I've said before, we're anxious not to produce a system that will resemble too closely the sort of extortion that goes on in the United States; the bounty-hunting lawyers who crop up frequently. But I think there's an opportunity to have a sensible screening procedure that will be equitable to plaintiff and defendant.

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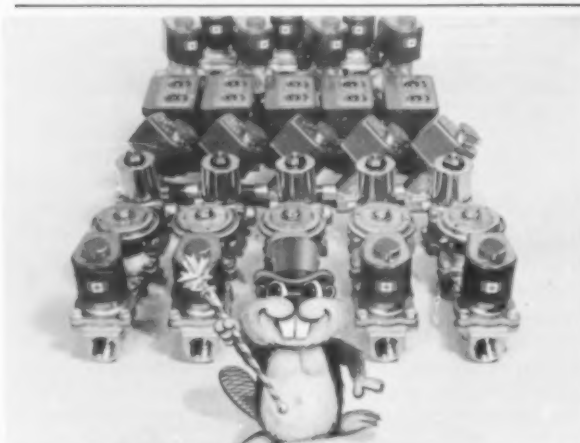
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